

NUMBER: S0063/OCEO

ACT: *Local Government Act 2009*

POLICY TITLE: INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS OF INAPPROPRIATE COUNCILLOR CONDUCT

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy sets out a process for dealing with complaints in regards to suspected inappropriate Councillor conduct as required by section 150AE of the *Local Government Act 2009*. However, this policy does not apply to Councillor conduct that is misconduct, corrupt conduct or unsuitable meeting conduct (to the extent the conduct is not inappropriate Councillor conduct).

This policy applies to investigations and determinations of a complaint about the suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor/s which has been referred by the Independent Assessor to Council to be dealt with.

2. COMMENCEMENT OF POLICY

This policy applies from 17 March 2021 and replaces all other policies, written or not, relating to the investigation of suspected inappropriate Councillor conduct complaints.

3. APPLICATION OF POLICY

This policy applies to all elected members of the Charters Towers Regional Council.

4. DEFINITIONS

Assessor	The Independent Assessor appointed under section 150CV of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Behavioural standard	A standard of behaviour for Councillors set out in the code of conduct approved under section 150E of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Conduct	Includes— (a) failing to act; and (b) a conspiracy, or attempt, to engage in conduct
Councillor Conduct Register	The register required to be kept by Council as set out in section 150DX of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Inappropriate conduct	Refer to section 150K of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Investigation policy	Refers to this policy, as required by section 150AE of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Investigator	The person responsible under this investigation policy for carrying out the investigation of the suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor or the Mayor
Meeting	Means a meeting of— (a) a local government; or (b) a committee of a local government
Misconduct	Refer to section 150L of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Model procedures	Refer to section 150F of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Natural justice	A set of principles to ensure fair and just decision making, including a fair hearing, an absence of bias, decisions based on evidence, and the proper examination of all facts in issue.
Referral notice	Refer to section 150AC of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>

Tribunal	Councillor Conduct Tribunal as established under section 150DK of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>
Unsuitable meeting conduct	Refer to section 150H of the <i>Local Government Act 2009</i>

5. POLICY PROVISIONS

5.1 Confidentiality

Matters of suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor are confidential except as otherwise specifically provided for either in the *Local Government Act 2009*, other applicable legislation or this investigation policy.

Note: It must be kept in mind that the matter is an allegation only and not yet proven. Further, there will be circumstances where the detail of the referral will need to remain confidential to the Local Government. Any release of confidential information that a Councillor knows, or should reasonably know, to be confidential to the local government may be contrary to section 171(3) of the Local Government Act 2009 and dealt with as misconduct.

5.1 Natural Justice

Any investigation of suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor/s must be carried out in accordance with natural justice. An overview of the principles of natural justice follows.

"Natural justice" or procedural fairness, refers to three key principles:

- the person being investigated has a chance to have his or her say before adverse formal findings are made and before any adverse action is taken (fair hearing);
- the investigator(s) should be objective and impartial (absence of bias); and
- any action taken is based on evidence (not suspicion or speculation).

A fair hearing means the Councillor who is the subject of the suspected inappropriate conduct complaint must be told of the case against them including any evidence and be provided with an opportunity to respond in writing with the investigation report provided to the Councillors as part of the meeting agenda.

An absence of bias means that any investigation must not be biased or be seen to be biased in any way. This principle embodies the concept of impartiality.

Ensuring decisions based on evidence requires that the investigation should not be based on mere speculation or suspicion but instead must be based upon evidentiary material. A proper examination of all the facts in issue means the investigation must give proper and genuine consideration to each party's case.

5.3 Assessor's referral

Council, where the Assessor has determined a referral is necessary, will receive from the Assessor a referral notice about the suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor/s. The referral notice will include details of the conduct and any complaint received about the conduct, state why the Assessor reasonably suspects that the Councillor has engaged in inappropriate conduct, and include information about the facts and circumstances that form the basis of the Assessor's reasonable suspicion.

The referral notice may be accompanied by a recommendation from the Assessor about how Council may investigate or deal with the conduct. The recommendation of the Assessor may be inconsistent with this policy.

The investigation must be conducted in a way consistent with:

- any recommendations of the Assessor;

- to the extent that this policy is not inconsistent with the recommendation of the assessor – this investigation policy; or
- in another way the Council decides by resolution (the resolution must state the decision and the reasons for the decision).

5.4 Receipt of Assessor's referral

On receipt of a referral notice about the suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor/s from the Assessor, the Council's Chief Executive Officer will forward a copy of that referral notice to the Mayor and all Councillors as a confidential document.

Should the Mayor or a Councillor (other than the subject of the complaint or the complainant) disagree with any recommendation accompanying the Assessor's referral notice or form the opinion that the complaint should be dealt with in a way other than under this policy, the Mayor or Councillor may request the matter be placed on the agenda of the next Council meeting to decide on the appropriate process to investigate the complaint. Such a request must be made in accordance with the Council's meeting procedure requirements.

5.5 Investigator

Unless otherwise resolved by Council, the Mayor will manage the investigation of suspected inappropriate conduct of other Councillors.

If the suspected inappropriate conduct involves conduct that in the circumstances, the Mayor believes, it is in the best interests of the investigation to refer the matter for external investigation, then the Chief Executive Officer must refer the suspected inappropriate conduct to the President of the Tribunal to investigate and make recommendations to the Council about dealing with the conduct.

If the suspected inappropriate conduct involves an allegation about the conduct of the Mayor or the Mayor as the complainant, then the Chief Executive Officer may refer the suspected inappropriate conduct to the President of the Tribunal, or another entity, to investigate and make recommendations to the Council about dealing with the conduct.

5.6 Early Resolution

Before beginning an investigation, the investigator should consider whether the matter is appropriate for resolution prior to the investigation. This consideration can include any recommendations made by the assessor.

A matter is only appropriate for early resolution if the parties to the matter both voluntarily agree to explore early resolution. The investigator may engage an independent person with suitable qualifications or experience to facilitate this process.

If the matter cannot be resolved, the matter will then be investigated as outlined in this investigation policy.

If the matter is resolved prior to investigation, the investigator will advise the chief executive officer of this outcome. In turn, the chief executive officer will advise the mayor (if the mayor is not the investigator) and all councillors that the matter has been resolved. The chief executive officer will also update the councillor conduct register to reflect this.

5.7 Timeliness

The investigator will make all reasonable endeavors to complete the investigation and provide a report for inclusion on the agenda of a Council meeting no more than eight weeks after the receipt of the complaint.

Note: If the investigator is of the opinion that it may take longer than eight weeks to complete the investigation, the matter should be raised with the Mayor (if the Mayor is not the investigator) to seek an extension of time, further noting any valid extension request will not be unreasonably withheld.

5.8 Assistance for investigator

If the Mayor, or another Councillor appointed by Council resolution, is the investigator of a complaint of suspected inappropriate conduct, the Mayor or Councillor may use section 170A of the *Local Government Act 2009* to seek advice or information during the investigation from a local government employee.

The Mayor is authorised by Council to expend money as reasonably necessary to engage contractors for the purposes of an investigation, though engagement must in accordance with the Council's Procurement Policy.

5.9 Possible misconduct or corrupt conduct

If during the course of an investigation the investigator obtains information which indicates a Councillor/s may have engaged in misconduct, the investigator must cease the investigation and advise the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer will then notify the Assessor of the possible misconduct.

If during the course of an investigation, the investigator obtains information which indicates a Councillor/s may have engaged in corrupt conduct, the investigator must cease the investigation and advise the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer will then notify the Crime and Corruption Commission of the possible corrupt conduct.

Instances of suspected misconduct or corrupt conduct may be referred back to the Council if determined by the Assessor or Crime and Corruption Commission to be inappropriate conduct.

5.10 Completion of investigation

On the completion of an investigation, the investigator will provide a report to the Council outlining as appropriate:

- The investigation process.
- The investigation findings.
- Documents or other evidence obtained.
- Confirmation that the subject Councillor has been provided with an opportunity to respond to the complaint and the evidence gathered.
- A statement of any relevant previous disciplinary history.
- Any recommendations about dealing with the conduct.

If there is risk to the health and safety of the complainant, under section 254J of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, Council may resolve that the meeting be closed to the public for the Councillors to consider the investigation report and any recommendations.

Council (with the exception of the Councillor at the subject of the investigation and the complainant, if another Councillor) will consider the findings and recommendations of the investigator's report and decide whether the Councillor has engaged in inappropriate conduct and, if so, what action will it take under section 150AH of the *Local Government Act 2009*.

5.11 Disciplinary action against Councillors

If Council decides at the completion of the investigation that the Councillor has engaged in inappropriate conduct, Council may:

- (i) order that no action be taken against the Councillor, or
- (ii) make an order outlining action the Councillor must undertake in accordance with section 150AH(1)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2009*.

5.12 Notice about the outcome of investigation

After an investigation is finalised, Council must give notice of the outcome of the investigation to the person who made the complaint about the Councillor/s conduct that was the subject of the investigation.

5.13 Councillor Conduct Register

The Chief Executive Officer must ensure decisions about suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor/s must be entered into the Councillor Conduct Register.

Where a complaint has been withdrawn by the complainant, the Chief Executive Officer will update the register to reflect that the complaint was withdrawn.

5.13 Expenses

Council must pay any reasonable expenses of Council associated with the informal early resolution or investigation of suspected inappropriate conduct of a Councillor including any costs of:

- the president of the Tribunal in undertaking an investigation for Council;
- an independent investigator engaged on behalf of, or by the Tribunal;
- an independent investigator engaged on behalf of Council;
- travel where the investigator was required to travel to undertake the investigation or to interview witnesses;
- seeking legal advice; or
- engaging an expert.

Note: Council may order the subject Councillor reimburse it for all or some of the costs arising from the Councillor's inappropriate conduct. Any costs incurred by complainants or the subject Councillors will not be met by Council.

6 VARIATIONS

6.1 Council reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this policy from time to time.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012*
- *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*
- Strategic Policy Fraud and Corruption Prevention Framework STRAT0025
- Statutory Policy Management of Fraud and Corruption (S0054)
- Statutory Policy Minister's Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors (S0056)
- Councillor Conduct Register F0456/CEO

DOCUMENT REVIEW:

The document is to be reviewed upon changes to relevant legislation, or every two years if no changes have been required to be enacted.

Document Adopted: Council Meeting 17 March 2021
Resolution Number: 3564

Document Contact: Amy Russell
Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer

Document Authorised: Aaron Johansson
Chief Executive Officer

Document ECM No: 1226206



CEO Signature

WORKPLACE PARTICIPANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge:

- *receiving the CTRC Investigating Complaints of Inappropriate Councillor Conduct Policy;*
- *that I should comply with the policy; and*
- *that there may be disciplinary consequences if I fail to comply, which may result in me being dismissed from my employment.*

Your name:

Signed:

Date:

Item #	Councillor's Name	Date of Complaint	Summary of Complaint	Category of Complaint: • Unsuitable meeting conduct • Inappropriate conduct • Misconduct • Corrupt conduct	Referral to: • Mayor • Independent Assessor • CCC	Summary of Decision & Reasons for Decision

Councillor Conduct Register

A Local Government must keep a register about the following matters (see section 150DX of the *Local Government Act 2009*):

- orders made about unsuitable meeting conduct
- decisions about suspected inappropriate conduct referred to the local government
- decisions made by the Councillor Conduct Tribunal about whether councillors engaged in misconduct or inappropriate conduct
- complaints about the conduct of councillors dismissed by the Assessor
- decisions by the Independent Assessor to take no further action about complaint.

This register, further helps the Mayor to keep track of the number of orders made for unsuitable meeting conduct in a 12 month period.